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UNCLAS DJIBOUTI 000094

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF AND AF/E  
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LONDON, PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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SUBJECT: FIGHTING DROUGHT IN DJIBOUTI

1. (U) SUMMARY: The Government of Djibouti has launched an appeal to the donor community, including Western and Arab countries with missions accredited to Djibouti, to fight famine currently threatening more than 70,000 of Djibouti's citizens. Like other countries in the Horn of Africa region, Djibouti is facing a drought that is impacting both livestock and people. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) Djiboutian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mahmoud Ali Youssouf met with Ambassadors and cooperation representatives of donor countries accredited in Djibouti, including the U.S., on January 18 and 19. He informed them of the local situation and made note of President Guelleh's address to the nation on the occasion of Eid Al-Adha in which he announced that a large number of Djibouti's citizens faced a food shortage in the interior regions because of drought. Mahmoud added that 47,000 families could perish if not rescued. Youssouf said he was confident of "positive reactions" from donor states.

3. (U) Ambassador told the Minister of Foreign Affairs during the meeting that the U.S through USAID already has in the Port of Djibouti 660 metric tons of food aid to assist Djibouti with the drought. She also said she had heard the appeal coming from the President and that the Embassy in consultation with USAID would determine if additional resources could be provided. Combined Joint Task Force-Horn of Africa representatives, stationed at Camp Lemonier, accompanied Ambassador and USAID representative and indicated their willingness to help with logistics, if needed.

4. (U) Under USAID auspices, a Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWSNET) operates in Djibouti and issues periodic emergency alerts when a significant food crisis is occurring and where portions of the population are located that are or might be affected by crisis. It issued such an alert on January 11 and noted that successive failure of the main season rains and prolonged droughts in certain livestock dependent areas had severely affected pastoral livelihoods. According to FEWSNET, the drought also created critical water shortages for both human and animals.

5. (U) The World Food Program (WFP) estimates that 5.4 million people living in Kenya, Ethiopia, Somalia and Djibouti are facing famine and the WFP Director for Central and East Africa is urging donors broadly to respond in order to avoid a humanitarian disaster. WFP estimates indicate that 47,000 are in need in Djibouti and that this number might reach 60,000 during the coming months. FEWSNET states that 230,000 persons are at risk.

6. (U) Comment: The figures on population members affected vary significantly. While WFP indicates they are assisting 47,000 individuals affected by the drought in Djibouti, the MFA indicates 47,000 families are affected. USAID believes FEWSNET estimates that 70,000 people require immediate humanitarian assistance, while 230,000 are "at risk." The Ministry of Interior plans an assessment before the second week in February to verify the numbers affected. END COMMENT.